

EXHIBIT E
to Declaration of Steve Loe

Southern California Native Freshwater Fauna Working Group

February 23, 2015

Jody Noiron, Forest Supervisor
San Bernardino National Forest
602 S. Tippecanoe Ave.
San Bernardino, CA 92408

Re: URGENT - Extreme Drought and Strawberry Creek Emergency in SBNF

Dear Ms. Noiron:

We are a group of citizens and scientists who are dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Southern California native freshwater fauna. Our group has members from the general public and from many government agencies, universities and conservation groups.

We are extremely concerned about the current historic and potentially long-term drought and the effects on Strawberry Creek (San Bernardino Mountains, Santa Ana Watershed) and associated resources. We are also concerned that the Forest Service permit for the spring development and removal of water by Nestle expired a long time ago, but they continue to remove water. Conditions have changed greatly since the permits were issued. We now know much more about groundwater/surface water relationships, the habitat, and riparian/aquatic species use in this area as a result of all the work done by the Forest Service and Metropolitan Water District (MWD) on the Arrowhead Tunnel project.

Our group has been concerned about the health of Strawberry Creek for many years. Strawberry Creek supported Santa Ana speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus* ssp.) for thousands of years; the dace were only recently extirpated. This was in part we believe because of a drying climate and the unnatural removal of so much water from the headwaters. The Santa Ana speckled dace is a California Species of Special Concern (SSC). California Department of Fish and Wildlife has designated certain species as SSC because declining population levels, limited ranges, and/or continuing threats have made them vulnerable to extinction. This fish is designated as Sensitive by the U.S. Forest Service and Threatened by American Fisheries Society.

Many of our members have worked in Strawberry Creek. The stream is severely impacted by the removal of up to 400 acre feet per year in high rainfall years and an average of 200 acre feet per year. This is a huge amount of water for a stream like Strawberry Creek when it is taken from the headwaters. Removal of water in the summer months results in large areas of the stream being dewatered. With this severe drought, even the areas that have not dried for thousands of years could dry up. Even the combined flow of West and East Twin and Strawberry Creek is almost non-existent due to the drought and water removal.

We are concerned about the health of the watershed for all other species that are dependent upon surface water, moist conditions and water within reach of roots of desirable perennial plants. We are seeing some loss of riparian plants on the margins of the stream in areas we have been able to visit. Strawberry Creek has been identified as a priority for reintroduction of Santa Ana speckled dace and as having potential for future mountain yellow-legged frog (*Rana muscosa*) reintroduction. It is an extremely valuable resource in maintaining southern California biological diversity. This is a priority in the Forest Plan and a priority of our group.

We were a part of the groups and individuals who wanted to meet in September regarding the stream and the expired permit, and were very disappointed that the Forest Service and Nestle were not willing to meet at that time. Changes were needed then and need to be made immediately to protect the stream this next summer and in perpetuity.

With the continued severe drought and almost no rain in the highest rainfall month of the year, Strawberry Creek is in big trouble. Please consider not removing any water from the Strawberry Creek springs until the permit is brought up to date and includes measures that will protect the ecosystem. We would still like to meet as was proposed in September. We have members who have knowledge of Strawberry Creek and groundwater/surface water relationships that are willing to volunteer to help find management solutions.

Please call Steve Loe at 909-809-4726 or myself at 626-826-8226 if we can help or if you are willing to meet with us. This is extremely important to our shared mission.

Sincerely,



Jonathan N. Baskin, Ph.D.
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Emeritus Professor of Biological Sciences
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Pomona, CA 91768

Cc:

Tom Tidwell, Chief
USDA Forest Service

Randy Moore, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service, Region 5

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